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THE CLAN OF THE CAVE BEAR AND *THE MAMMOTH HUNTERS*

The Plains of Passage

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Jean M. Auel

EARTH'S CHILDREN

The Plains of Passage

Jean M. Auel



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THE PLAINS OF PASSAGE

A Bantam Book / published by arrangement with the author

PRINTING HISTORY

Crown edition published 1990

Bantam Export edition / October 1991

Bantam edition / November 1991

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ISBN 0-553-28941-1

Published simultaneously in the United States and Canada

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Office and in other countries. Marca Registrada. Bantam Books, 666 Fifth Avenue,
New York, New York 10103.*

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

OPM 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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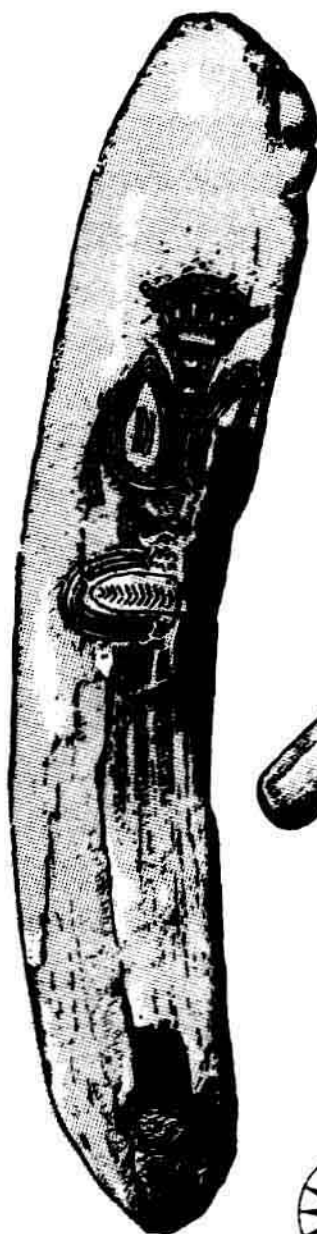
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THE CLAN OF THE CAVE BEAR
THE VALLEY OF HORSES
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For LENORE,
 the last to come home,
 whose namesake appears in these pages,
and for MICHAEL,
 who looks forward with her,
and for DUSTIN JOYCE and WENDY,
 with love.

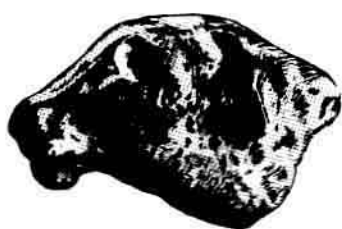


STYLIZED FEMALE FORM. Engraving on a mammoth's tusk.
Height 6 1/8 in. / 15.5 cm. Předměstí, Moravia, Czechoslovakia.



PIERCED STAFF
with Abstract Decorations.
Found at Laugerie Haute.
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HEAD OF A LIONESS. Small sculpture in fired clay. Height $1\frac{4}{5}$ in. / 4.5 cm. Dolni Věstonice, Moravia, Czechoslovakia.

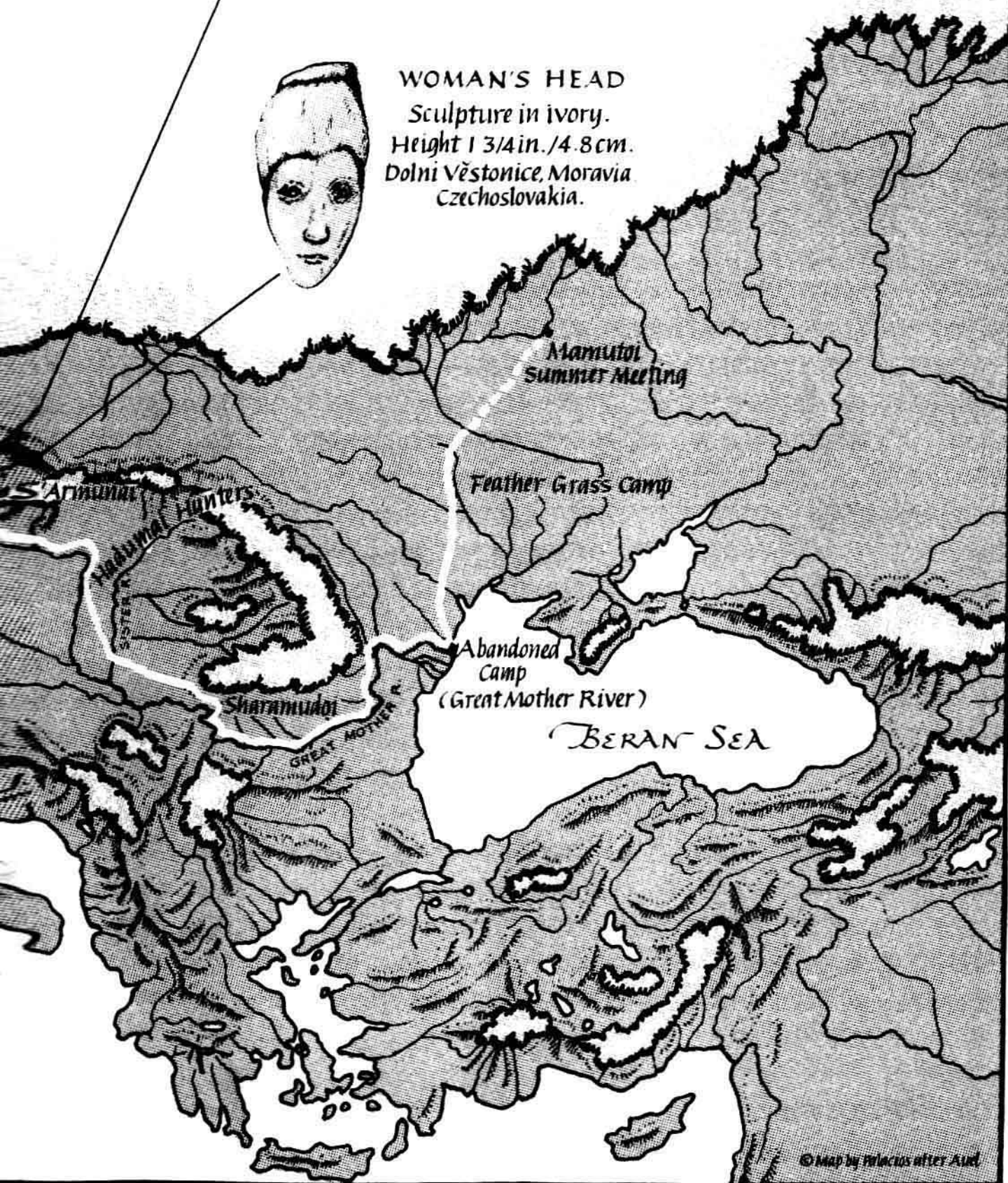
EARTH'S CHILDREN™

PREHISTORIC EUROPE DURING THE ICE AGE

Extent of ice and change in coastlines during 10,000-year interstadial, a warming trend during the Wurm glaciation of the late Pleistocene Epoch extending from 35,000 to 25,000 years before present.



WOMAN'S HEAD
Sculpture in ivory.
Height $1\frac{3}{4}$ in. / 4.8 cm.
Dolni Věstonice, Moravia, Czechoslovakia.



1

The woman caught a glimpse of movement through the dusty haze ahead and wondered if it was the wolf she had seen loping in front of them earlier.

She glanced at her companion with a worried frown, then looked for the wolf again, straining to see through the blowing dust.

“Jondalar! Look!” she said, pointing ahead.

Toward her left, the vague outlines of several conical tents could just be seen through the dry, gritty wind.

The wolf was stalking some two-legged creatures that had begun to materialize out of the dusty air, carrying spears aimed directly at them.

“I think we’ve reached the river, but I don’t think we’re the only ones who wanted to camp there, Ayla,” the man said, pulling on the lead rein to halt his horse.

The woman signaled her horse to a stop by tightening a thigh muscle, exerting a subtle pressure that was so reflexive she didn’t even think of it as controlling the animal.

Ayla heard a menacing growl from deep in the wolf’s

throat and saw that his posture had shifted from a defensive stance to an aggressive one. He was ready to attack! She whistled, a sharp, distinctive sound that resembled a bird call, though not from a bird anyone had ever heard. The wolf gave up his stealthy pursuit and bounded toward the woman astride the horse.

"Wolf, stay close!" she said, signaling with her hand at the same time. The wolf trotted beside the dun yellow mare as the woman and man on horseback slowly approached the people standing between them and the tents.

A gusty, fitful wind, holding the fine loess soil in suspension, swirled around them, obscuring their view of the spear holders. Ayla lifted her leg over and slid down from the horse's back. She knelt beside the wolf, put one arm over his back and the other across his chest, to calm him and hold him back if necessary. She could feel the snarl rumbling in his throat and the eager tautness of muscles ready to spring. She looked up at Jondalar. A light film of powdery dirt coated the shoulders and long flaxen hair of the tall man and turned the coat of his dark brown mount to the more common dun color of the sturdy breed. She and Whinney looked the same. Though it was still early in the summer, the strong winds off the massive glacier to the north were already desiccating the steppes in a wide band south of the ice.

She felt the wolf tense and strain against her arm, then saw someone new appear from behind the spear holders, dressed as Mamut might have dressed for an important ceremony, in a mask with aurochs's horns and in clothes painted and decorated with enigmatic symbols.

The mamut shook a staff at them vigorously and shouted, "Go away, evil spirits! Leave this place!"

Ayla thought it was a woman's voice shouting through the mask, but she wasn't sure; the words had been spoken in Mamutoi, though. The mamut dashed toward them shaking the staff again, while Ayla held back the wolf. Then the costumed figure began chanting and dancing, shaking the staff and high-stepping toward them quickly, then back again, as though trying to scare them off or drive them away, and succeeding, at least, in frightening the horses.

She was surprised that Wolf was so ready to attack, wolves seldom threatened people. But, remembering behavior she had observed, she thought she understood. Ayla had often watched wolves when she was teaching herself to hunt, and

she knew they were affectionate and loyal to their own pack. But they were quick to drive strangers away from their territory, and they had been known to kill other wolves to protect what they felt was theirs.

To the tiny wolf pup she had found and brought back to the Mamutoi earthlodge, the Lion Camp was his pack; other people would be like strange wolves to him. He had growled at unknown humans who had come to visit when he was barely half-grown. Now, in unfamiliar territory, perhaps the territory of another pack, it would be natural for him to feel defensive when he first became aware of strangers, especially hostile strangers with spears. Why had the people of this Camp drawn spears?

Ayla thought there was something familiar about the chant; then she realized what it was. The words were in the sacred archaic language that was understood only by the mamuti. Ayla didn't understand all of it, Mamut had just begun to teach her the language before she left, but she did gather that the meaning of the loud chant was essentially the same as the words that had been shouted earlier, though cast in somewhat more cajoling terms. It was an exhortation to the strange wolf and horse-people spirits to go away and leave them alone, to go back to the spirit world where they belonged.

Speaking in Zelandonii so the people from the Camp wouldn't understand, Ayla told Jondalar what the mamut was saying.

"They think we're spirits? Of course!" he said. "I should have known. They're afraid of us. That's why they're threatening us with spears. Ayla, we may have this problem every time we meet people along the way. We are used to the animals now, but most people have never thought of horses or wolves as anything but food or pelts," he said.

"The Mamutoi at the Summer Meeting were upset in the beginning. It took them a while to get used to the idea of having the horses and Wolf around, but they got over it," Ayla said.

"When I opened my eyes that first time in the cave in your valley and saw you helping Whinney give birth to Racer, I thought the lion had killed me and I had awakened in the spirit world," Jondalar said. "Maybe I should get down, too, and show them I am a man and not attached to Racer like some kind of man-horse spirit."

Jondalar dismounted, but he held on to the rope attached to the halter he had made. Racer was tossing his head and trying to back away from the advancing mamut, who was still shaking the staff and chanting loudly. Whinney was behind the kneeling woman, with her head down, touching her. Ayla used neither ropes nor halters to guide her horse. She directed the horse entirely with the pressures of her legs and the movements of her body.

Catching a few sounds of the strange language the spirits spoke, and seeing Jondalar dismount, the shaman chanted louder, pleading with the spirits to go away, promising them ceremonies, trying to placate them with offers of gifts.

"I think you should tell them who we are," Ayla said. "That mamut is getting very upset."

Jondalar held the rope close to the stallion's head. Racer was alarmed and trying to rear, and the mamut with her staff and shouting didn't help. Even Whinney looked ready to spook, and she was usually much more even-tempered than her excitable offspring.

"We are not spirits," Jondalar called out when the mamut paused for a breath. "I am a visitor, a traveler on a Journey, and she"—he pointed toward Ayla—"is Mamutoi, of the Mammoth Hearth."

The people glanced at each other with questioning looks, and the mamut stopped shouting and dancing, but still shook the staff now and then while studying them. Maybe they were spirits who were playing tricks, but at least they had been made to speak in a language everyone could understand. Finally the mamut spoke.

"Why should we believe you? How do we know you are not trying to trick us? You say she is of the Mammoth Hearth, but where is her mark? She has no tattoo on her face."

Ayla spoke up. "He didn't say I was a mamut. He said I was of the Mammoth Hearth. The old Mamut of the Lion Camp was teaching me before I left, but I am not fully trained."

The mamut conferred with a man and a woman, then turned back. "This one," she said, nodding toward Jondalar, "he is as he says, a visitor. Though he speaks well enough, it is with the tones of a foreign tongue. You say you are Mamutoi, yet something about the way you speak is not Mamutoi."

Jondalar caught his breath and waited. Ayla did have an

unusual quality to her speech. There were certain sounds she could not quite make, and the way she said them was curiously unique. It was perfectly clear what she meant, and not unpleasant—he rather liked it—but it was noticeable. It wasn't quite like the accent of another language; it was more than that, and different. Yet it was just that: an accent, but of a language most people had not heard and would not even recognize as speech. Ayla spoke with the accent of the difficult, guttural, vocally limited language of the people who had taken in the young orphan girl and raised her.

"I was not born to the Mamutoi," Ayla said, still holding Wolf back, though his growl had ceased. "I was adopted by the Mammoth Hearth, by Mamut, himself."

There was a flurry of conversation among the people, and another private consultation between the mamut and the woman and man.

"If you are not of the spirit world, how do you control that wolf and make horses take you on their backs?" the mamut asked, deciding to come right out with it.

"It's not hard to do if you find them when they are young," Ayla said.

"You make it sound so simple. There must be more to it than that." The woman couldn't fool a mamut, who was also of the Mammoth Hearth.

"I was there when she brought the wolf pup to the lodge," Jondalar tried to explain. "He was so young that he was still nursing, and I was sure he would die. But she fed him cut-up meat and broth, waking up in the middle of the night as you do with a baby. When he lived, and started to grow, everyone was surprised, but that was only the beginning. Later, she taught him to do what she wished—not to pass water or make messes inside the lodge, not to snap at the children even when they hurt him. If I hadn't been there, I would not have believed a wolf could be taught so much or would understand so much. It's true, you must do more than find them young. She cared for him like a child. She is a mother to that animal, that's why he does what she wants."

"What about the horses?" the man who was standing beside the shaman asked. He'd been eying the spirited stallion, and the tall man who was controlling him.

"It is the same with the horses. You can teach them if you find them young and take care of them. It takes time and patience, but they will learn."

The people had lowered their spears and were listening with great interest. Spirits weren't known to speak in ordinary language, although all the talk of mothering animals was just the kind of strange talk that spirits were known for—words that were not quite what they seemed.

Then the woman of the Camp spoke. "I don't know about being a mother to animals, but I do know that the Mammoth Hearth doesn't adopt strangers and make them Mamutoi. It's not an ordinary hearth. It is dedicated to Those Who Serve the Mother. People choose the Mammoth Hearth, or are chosen. I have kin in the Lion Camp. Mamut is very old, perhaps the oldest man living. Why would he want to adopt anyone? And I don't think Lutie would have allowed it. What you say is very difficult to believe, and I don't know why we should."

Ayla sensed something ambiguous in the way the woman spoke, or rather in the subtle mannerisms that accompanied her words: the stiffness of her back, the tension in the set of her shoulders, the anxious frown. She seemed to be anticipating something unpleasant. Then Ayla realized that it wasn't a slip of the tongue; the woman had purposely put a lie in her statement, a subtle trick in her question. But because of her unique background, the trick was blatantly transparent.

The people who had raised Ayla, known as flatheads, but who called themselves Clan, communicated with depth and precision, though not primarily with words. Few people understood they had a language at all. Their ability to articulate was limited and they were often reviled as less than human, animals that could not talk. They used a language of gestures and signs, but it was no less complex.

The relatively few words the Clan spoke—which Jondalar could hardly reproduce, just as she was not quite able to pronounce certain sounds in Zelandonii or Mamutoi—were made with a peculiar kind of vocalization, and they were usually used for emphasis, or for names of people or things. Nuances and fine shades of meaning were indicated by bearing, posture, and facial aspects, which added depth and variety to the language, just as tones and inflections did in verbal language. But with such an overt means of communication, it was almost impossible to express an untruth without signaling the fact; they could not lie.

Ayla had learned to perceive and understand the subtle signals of body movement and facial expression as she was learning to speak with signs; it was necessary for complete

comprehension. When she was relearning to speak verbally from Jondalar, and becoming fluent in Mamutoi, Ayla discovered that she was perceiving the inadvertent signals that were contained in the slight movements of face and posture even of people who spoke with words, though such gestures were not intentionally meant to be a part of their language.

She discovered that she was understanding more than words, though it caused her some confusion and distress at first, because the words that were spoken did not always match the signals that were given, and she did not know about lies. The closest she could come to untruth was to refrain from speaking.

Eventually she learned that certain small lies were often meant as courtesies. But it was when she gained an understanding of humor—which usually depended on saying one thing but meaning another—that she suddenly grasped the nature of spoken language, and the people who used it. Then her ability to interpret unconscious signals added an unexpected dimension to her developing language skills: an almost uncanny perception of what people really meant. It gave her an unusual advantage. Though she wasn't able to lie herself, except by omission, she usually knew when someone else was not telling the truth.

"There was no one named Lutie in the Lion Camp when I was there." Ayla decided to be direct. "Tulie is the headwoman, and her brother Talut is the headman."

The woman nodded imperceptibly as Ayla went on.

"I know that a person is usually dedicated to the Mammoth Hearth, not adopted. Talut and Nezzie were the ones who asked me, Talut even enlarged the earthlodge to make a special winter shelter for the horses, but the old Mamut surprised everyone. During the ceremony, he adopted me. He said that I belonged to the Mammoth Hearth, that I was born to it."

"If you brought those horses with you to Lion Camp, I can understand why old Mamut might say that," the man said.

The woman looked at him with annoyance and said a few words under her breath. Then the three people spoke together again. The man had decided the strangers were probably people and not spirits playing a trick—or if they were, not harmful ones—but he did not believe they were exactly who they claimed to be. The tall man's explanation for the strange

behavior of the animals was too simple, but he was interested. The horses and wolf intrigued him. The woman felt they spoke too easily, volunteered too much, were too forthcoming, and she was sure there was more to it than either of them said. She didn't trust them and she wanted nothing to do with them.

The mamut's acceptance of them as human came only after apprehending another thought that would, to one who understood such things, account for the extraordinary behavior of the animals much more plausibly. She was sure the blond woman was a powerful Caller, and the old Mamut must have known she was born with an uncanny control over animals. Perhaps the man was, too. Later, when their Camp arrived at the Summer Meeting, it would be interesting to talk to the Lion Camp, and the mamuti would be sure to have some thoughts about these two. It was easier to believe in magic than the preposterous notion that animals could be domesticated.

During their consultation, there was a disagreement. The woman was uncomfortable, the strangers disturbed her. If she had thought about it, she might have admitted she was afraid. She didn't like being around such an overt demonstration of occult power, but she was overruled. The man spoke.

"This place where the rivers join is a good place to camp. We have had good hunting, and a herd of giant deer are coming this way. They should be here in a few days. We will not mind if you choose to camp nearby and join us in the hunt."

"We appreciate your offer," Jondalar said. "We may camp nearby for the night, but we must be on our way in the morning."

It was a guarded offer, not quite the welcoming that he had often received from strangers when he and his brother had traveled together on foot. The formal greeting, given in the name of the Mother, offered more than hospitality. It was considered an invitation to join them, to stay with them and live among them for a time. The man's more limited invitation showed their uncertainty, but at least they weren't being threatened with spears anymore.

"Then, in the name of Mut, at least share an evening meal with us, and eat with us in the morning, too." That much welcome the headman could offer, and Jondalar sensed he would have liked to offer more.

"In the name of the Great Earth Mother, we would be happy to eat with you tonight, after we have set up our camp," Jondalar agreed, "but we must leave early."

"Where are you going in such a hurry?"

The directness that was typical of the Mamutoi still caught Jondalar by surprise, even after all the time he'd lived with them, especially when it came from a stranger. The headman's question would have been thought somewhat impolite among Jondalar's people; not a major indiscretion, just a sign of immaturity, or lack of appreciation for the more subtle and indirect speech of knowing adults.

But, Jondalar had learned, candor and directness were considered proper among the Mamutoi, and lack of openness was suspect, though their ways were not as completely open as they seemed. Subtleties existed. It was a matter of how one expressed directness, how it was received, and what was not said. But the forthright curiosity of the headman of this Camp was, among the Mamutoi, entirely appropriate.

"I am going home," Jondalar said, "and I'm bringing this woman back with me."

"Why should a day or two make any difference?"

"My home is far to the west. I've been gone . . ." Jondalar stopped to consider, "four years, and it will take another year to get back, if we are lucky. There are some dangerous crossings—rivers and ice—along the way, and I don't want to reach them at the wrong season."

"West? It looks like you're traveling south."

"Yes. We are heading for Beran Sea and the Great Mother River. We will follow her upstream."

"My cousin went west on a trading mission, some years back. He said some people there live near a river they also call the Great Mother," the man said. "He thought it was the same one. They traveled west from here. Depends how far upstream you want to go, but there is a passage south of the Great Ice, but north of the mountains to the west. You might make your Journey much shorter by going that way."

"Talut told me of the northern route, but no one seems to be sure that it is the same river. If it's not, it could take longer trying to find the right one. I came the southern way, and I know that route. Besides, I have kin among the River People. My brother was mated to a Sharamudoi woman, and I lived with them. I'd like to see them once more. It's not likely that I will ever see them again."